

FINAL REPORT
OFFICIAL TRIP TO MOSCOW
by
U.S. CHAIRMAN
of the
UNITED STATES-RUSSIA JOINT COMMISSION ON POW/MIAs
GENERAL ROBERT H. "DOC" FOGLESONG
December 3-6, 2007

Summary: From December 3-6, 2007, General (ret.) Robert H. "Doc" Foglesong, U.S. Chairman of the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs, visited Moscow, Russia, in an effort to urge Russian counterparts to reactivate their participation in the Commission's work. Gen. Foglesong was accompanied by Norman D. Kass, Executive Secretary of the U.S. side, and Svetlana Shevchenko, Foreign Affairs Specialist, JCSD.

Although previously proposed by the Russian Government, a planned courtesy call by Foglesong on Russian President Putin was not granted, with no explanation provided. Likewise, early Russian indications that the U.S. Chairman would meet with either a deputy prime minister or the minister of defense did not materialize.

Sessions held during the brief visit included a meeting on December 3 with the U.S. ambassador, Hon. William J. Burns, who briefed Gen Foglesong on the current political situation in Russia (the meeting took place the day after the parliamentary elections). Burns was very well informed on the U.S. efforts to reinstate the Joint Commission and expressed his full support of the work of the Commission and its embassy-based support staff. The ambassador also noted that the Foglesong visit should have a positive impact on overall U.S.-Russia relations, which are not ideal at the moment.

Later that day, Foglesong met with General Ruslan S. Aushev, Head of the War Veterans Committee (the Committee) of the Governments of the Commonwealth of Independent States at the headquarters of his organization. Joining Aushev for the session was Rashid A. Karimov, who was recently appointed to the Russian side of the Joint Commission. Foglesong underscored the importance of veterans' service organizations (VSOs) in revitalizing the Joint Commission's work and expressed his readiness to assist Gen Aushev in forging closer ties with U.S. VSOs. Turning to specific areas of cooperation, Foglesong called upon Aushev to assist the U.S. side in identifying and making available for interviews former Soviet officers who might possess information about U.S. MIAs from the Vietnam War.

In response, Gen Aushev agreed to canvass his Committee's membership and identify potential candidates for interviews, first in the Moscow region and then throughout the Russian Federation and other geographical regions in which his organization holds sway. Aushev emphasized the importance of the recent decision to reconstitute the Russian Interagency Commission and urged active cooperation with General-Colonel Nikolai I. Reznik, the newly appointed Russian Chairman. To advance the investigation into reports of American servicemen held in Soviet prison camps, Aushev suggested that the U.S. side prepare a short documentary on the work of the Joint Commission and air it on the two central TV channels available in the distant parts of Russia. He was confident that local residents know where former GULag prisoners are buried and will contact the Joint Commission with available information. Before leaving Russia, Gen Foglesong sent a formal request to Aushev asking for help in locating officers from the Vietnam War in all former Soviet republics for interviewing purposes.

In sessions held on December 4 and 5, Gen. Foglesong had a chance to meet and discuss a range of issues with his Russian counterpart, General Reznik. The two chairmen reaffirmed the importance of finalizing the diplomatic notes essential to giving the Russian side of the Commission its legal standing; establishing a direct line of communication between them; initializing an interim work program, and reaching agreement on the need for a dedicated working group focusing on Soviet and post-Soviet losses.

During the two sessions, Reznik noted that the Russian side of the Commission is fully formed and includes 26 members under the leadership of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, and Executive Secretary. He emphasized the value of the Joint Commission's work as a symbol of shared humanitarian goals between the two countries, likening the current sessions to the historic meetings that occurred when Presidents Bush and Yeltsin inaugurated the Commission's work more than fifteen years earlier. Reznik gave his personal commitment to reinvigorate the work of the Joint Commission in memory of all those who fell in past conflicts. In particular, he acknowledged the importance of restoring and expanding access to historical records that might clarify the fates of those still unaccounted-for. As for the diplomatic notes, Reznik observed that a Russian draft has been completed. (A U.S. critique of the draft was presented at the session, and Reznik indicated that proposed changes to the text would be reviewed.)

Gen Foglesong congratulated Gen Reznik on his appointment as the Russian Chairman of the Joint Commission. He mentioned that, as a frequent visitor to Moscow on official matters, he can attest to the enormous changes that have taken place in Russia in recent years. Foglesong underscored that his task in the U.S. is to continue to underscore the importance of the Commission's work, emphasizing its unique humanitarian attributes, separate and distinct from other issues on which our two governments cooperate and on which they may have differing views. He noted that, as the U.S. Chairman, he reports directly to President Bush, who is deeply committed to the

POW/MIA issue. Foglesong went on to offer his perception that, to be effective and consistent with its founding principles, the Commission must truly be bilateral in scope and of mutual benefit to both sides. In recognition thereof, he proposed that a working group be constituted specifically to account for Soviet-era losses during the war in Afghanistan, a suggestion readily endorsed by Reznik. Turning to the question of tangible steps to re-launch the Commission into constructive orbit, Foglesong proposed a series of timely initiatives: creating a set of objectives and the milestones for gauging success in reaching them; setting dates for the Commission's next plenary session and, in the interim, determining the efficacy of holding meetings by individual working groups as a step in defining objectives and establishing requisite resource levels. To initiate the process, Foglesong suggested that the U.S. side prepare a roadmap with specific objectives (and dates) and forward it to Gen Reznik for comments and edits. The issues of foremost importance seemed to him to be the following: signing of diplomatic notes; establishing a direct line of communication for the matters that need to be discussed by the Chairmen, and restoring archival access.

Reznik promised to inform Gen Foglesong on access to the Ministry of Defense's archives in Podolsk before his visit ended. He expressed his full support for creating a working group on the Afghan War. He proposed that the Commission hold plenary sessions twice a year: in May (in commemoration of the WWII Victory Day), and in November (in recognition of U.S. Veterans Day). Gen Reznik stated that he and his colleagues are ready for cooperation and an open dialogue, as well as a search for productive ways to resolve issues still awaiting closure. He thanked the U.S. for its persistence in the POW/MIA cause and noted that a direct line of communication with Gen Foglesong would not be a problem.

Foglesong concluded that a big challenge is to keep their respective governments focused on the issue, especially in view of the elections in both countries next year, which can dominate the political scene. The POW/MIA issue is, however, a humanitarian pursuit and efforts to resolve it must be continued under any administration. Foglesong noted that veterans are an energetic and influential force and that we need to include them in our work, especially in view of their increasing numbers as a result of recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At Gen Reznik's proposal, the two Chairmen agreed to report on their discussions the following day at a meeting scheduled with the First Deputy Minister of Defense, General-Colonel Aleksandr Kolmakov.

The session with General Kolmakov was attended by US Ambassador to Russia, Hon. William J. Burns, who proclaimed unreservedly his readiness to support the Commission's work as a clear example of all that is positive in our bilateral relationship. The ambassador's remarks followed a review of the commission's current status, prompting Kolmakov to note his own interest in seeing the commission reactivated. A presentation by the U.S. side of efforts to recover the remains of an American World War

II serviceman buried together with Soviet personnel in a Hungarian gravesite elicited Kolmakov's pledge to pursue the matter with Hungarian authorities so that the case might soon be resolved. The meeting was cordial throughout.